

VZCZCXRO3276  
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHMK #1756/01 2811019  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 081019Z OCT 06  
FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5738  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHMFIS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001756

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2016

TAGS: PGOV KDEM PHUM BA POL

SUBJECT: ELECTION HIGHLIGHTS NO. 1: DATES ANNOUNCED,  
E-VOTING OUT

REF: A. MANAMA 1728

¶B. MANAMA 1691

¶C. MANAMA 1625

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) This is the first in a series of regular updates on the elections scene in the run-up to parliamentary and municipal elections to be held on November 25.

¶12. (SBU) ELECTIONS ANNOUNCED: King Hamad announced September 28 that the first round of parliamentary elections would be held on November 25, with the second round for run-offs between the top two vote-getters in the first round to be held one week later on December 2. Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa, who has administrative responsibility for the municipal elections, announced that elections for the municipal councils would occur on the same dates, November 25 and December 2. Voting for citizens outside the country will take place at Bahraini embassies and consulates on November 21 and 28.

¶13. (SBU) NO E-VOTING: Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and head of the Central Informatics Organization Shaikh Ahmed bin Attiyatallah Al Khalifa announced September 30 that use of e-voting would be "postponed" until the 2010 elections (Ref B). Sources state that the action was taken at the instruction of the King. Oppositionists praised this "wise decision," which came just hours after a meeting between political and civil societies and Shaikh Ahmed. Shia opposition society Al Wifaq Secretary General Shaikh Ali Salman said "this is a victory for the will of the public." He said a grouping of political societies would send a letter to the King thanking him for releasing Shia youth detained in a December 2005 airport riot and related demonstrations and protests and for canceling e-voting. The decision to postpone e-voting comes in the context of the controversy sparked by the "Bandargate" report (Ref A and paras 5 and 6 below).

¶14. (SBU) In contrast, MP Salah Ali, head of the Al Minbar (Muslim Brotherhood) bloc in the Council of Representatives explained that his society had supported e-voting only if there had been sufficient guarantees to ensure transparency. Salafi MP Jassim Al Saeedi expressed regret that e-voting would not be used, saying it was a pity that Bahrain did not use technology available to it and become a pioneer in the region.

¶15. (SBU) BANDARGATE: Following a week of heavy press coverage, the High Criminal Court October 4 issued an order banning the publishing of any news, comments, or information related to the legal case against Salah Al Bandar, the former advisor to Shaikh Ahmed bin Attiyatallah, who is accused of seizing official government documents and stealing private checks. The court cited articles 40 and 71 of the Press and

Publications Law of 2002 in explaining its decision. The Bahrain News Agency reported that this decision came after some newspapers covered the Bandargate story in a way that harmed the public interest and sowed sedition among members of the community. Perhaps reflecting the chill the decision cast over the press, only Al Wasat editor-in-chief Mansour Al Jamry commented on the decision, saying he respects the court's decision but regrets that the parliament did not use its constitutional authority and call for an urgent meeting on the issue. He lamented that the press alone had taken on the responsibility for covering this "public opinion" case.

¶6. (SBU) Shaikh Ali Salman hinted October 1 that a parliamentary committee would be formed to investigate the Bandar report if the government did not take the initiative and create a "neutral" committee for this purpose. Meanwhile, in London, Al Bandar told the press that in the next few days he would meet with Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett and members of the House of Lords and the EU to discuss the situation in Bahrain.

¶7. (SBU) ELECTION MONITORS: In response to Minister of Social Development Fatima Al Baloushi's call for the formation of a national non-governmental committee to operate under the supervision of the judiciary to monitor elections, the Bahrain Transparency Society, Bahrain Human Rights Society, and Bahrain Bar Association said they would form an independent committee to monitor elections. Al Baloushi responded that the three societies had no right form a separate committee. Human Rights Society member Salman Kamaleddin told the press that his group and the two others would not participate in the national committee unless it was truly independent. He said that the number of monitors was less important than their expertise and qualifications. He

MANAMA 00001756 002 OF 002

asked, "Why is the government afraid of independent observers if it is confident the elections will be free and fair?"

¶8. (SBU) Seven political societies issued a statement calling for independent international and local observers to monitor the elections to reinforce transparency. They also insisted on the formation of an independent national commission to supervise the election process instead of the judiciary. The societies underscored the importance of following the Kuwaiti example and not permitting military and security personnel to vote.

¶9. (SBU) CAMPAIGN FUNDING: The Prime Minister directed that the Ministry of Justice revise upward its formula for providing government funding for the election campaigns for candidates from registered political societies. Ironically, opposition society Al Wifaq announced it would receive the greatest amount of government support, BD 18,000 (\$48,000). The government's decision to provide funding to candidates of registered political societies works against independent candidates, who must rely upon personal resources or private donations to pay for their campaigns.

¶10. (SBU) CANDIDATES: President of the Private Sector Development Society (PSDS) Farouq Al Moayyed October 2 denied there was an agreement among business people to develop a candidates list for the elections. He said the PSDS was involved in charitable and developmental activities only, not politics. He noted that the society would meet soon with business people who intend to run in the elections, but these candidates did not represent PSDS. Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chair Essam Fakhro told the press October 3 that the Chamber encouraged interested business people and economists to run for parliament.

¶11. (SBU) VOTER ROLLS: According to the organizing committee, ten thousand people participated in a September 29 rally against "political naturalization." Government reports state that four thousand people participated. The demonstration was organized to protest the alleged

naturalization of thousands of South Asian residents of Bahrain. (Note: Per Ref C, the government has denied the charge, saying that 5,000 people have been naturalized in the past three years, all according to the conditions set out in Bahrain's citizenship law.) Al Wasat newspaper published a study September 30 that analyzes the voter rolls published in late September. By the newspaper's calculations, the rolls include over 17,000 more names than Al Wasat can account for.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: One of the possible results of the controversy sparked by the Bandar report is that the government may be more inclined to make decisions and take actions to promote transparency in the elections in an effort to demonstrate for all that it supports free and fair elections. The decision not to use e-voting can be seen in this context. Pressure is now building for truly independent elections monitors, with the Bahrain Transparency Society, Bahrain Human Rights Society, and Bahrain Bar Association taking the lead in advocating for legitimate observers (vice the committee organized by the Ministry of Social Development). Also, for the first time, political societies are calling for international observers. While the government may not go this far, the demand shows that reformers have been emboldened while sensing that the government may be on the defensive, at least for now.

\*\*\*\*\*

Visit Embassy Manama's Classified Website:

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/manama/>

\*\*\*\*\*

MONROE